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Structures without soul and immediate struggles: rethinking militant particularism in contemporary Spain¹

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Introduction

The focus of the article is the connection between the production in the present of particular memories of the past and the ability to frame present-day conflicts in terms of particular or universal claims and transformation projects. Through referring to past struggles and their outcomes, the process of framing will clarify what renders certain possibilities legitimate while excluding others. This connection between past and present realities, memories and struggles will appear in the reading of past struggles in terms of heroism or defeat, and in the way of incorporating those memories into present-day struggles in positive or negative terms. These different and interrelated processes express interlinked and diverse forms of dispossession that are simultaneously shaped by and contribute to shape the possible spaces and scales in which struggle can be meaningfully waged.

My attempt here is to analyze a particular case, in an industrial corner of Europe, trying to unveil the processes of definition and framing of conflict, the setting of the contending field of force, the design of the battlefield where struggle will be waged. This process is in itself part of the struggle, waged both in discursive terms and in material ones. On the one hand, tensions and contradictions in the way people access resources of different kinds (economic, political and symbolic) produce cleavages in

terms of spaces and identities of contention, but they are also the grounds for producing instruments that can help unify pluralities of experience. On the other hand, the construction of a wider collectivity appears as an oriented process, that is: it has a purpose, one that addresses subjects in their projection into the future (their livelihood, their career, their family life, their children, their retirement, their pension). The time dimension is thus embedded in the struggles to gain control over one's life in a plurality of levels: the more proximate level traces connections between past and present generations of concrete people (parents and children, mentors and pupils); an intermediate level traces connections between institutions, between the past and the present of organized groups; finally, there is a more abstract plane which traces connections at the structural level, between past and present logics of systemic reproduction, between logics of historical development. These connections between past and present at different levels of abstraction, in turn, enable people to operate at different spatial scales and result in different types of impact. This is how memory is expressed in practice, and how it gets involved in a very real sense in the framing of present-day struggles, and the defining of projects for the future. I will pursue these issues based on my recent fieldwork in Ferrol, an industrial town in Galicia (North Western Spain).

I started fieldwork in the town of Ferrol (A Coruña) in 2003, and I am still working there to date. Ferrol has the doubtful honor of having been the birthplace of General Franco, who re-named it after his glorious crusade as "Ferrol del Caudillo". However, very few people in Spain know that it was also the birthplace of Pablo Iglesias, the founder of the Spanish Socialist party (founded in 1870). This is symbolic of a space of tensions, where the military (the Navy) and the shipyard workers have simultaneously confronted and cooperated with each other, starting in the eighteenth century. What

attracted me to Ferrol was precisely the tension that emerged so powerfully during the Franco regime (1939-1975): On the one hand, the outmost expression of the regime's repressive might, the military;² on the other, the outmost expression of working class struggles, the organized workers of the Empresa Nacional Bazán, the nationalized shipyards. By the early 1970s the public military shipyard (Bazán) and the initially private commercial shipyard (Astano) employed some 20,000 workers and provided a living wage in almost every household. The definition of this industry as "strategic" and key to developing the strength of the nation resulted in stable, relatively well paid employment for the male population, which in turn produced a strong, well organized working class movement.

Through the experiences, practices and narratives of different generations of workers in Ferrol I would like to address the following general issue: What kinds of collectives need to be produced in order to achieve a radical transformation of capitalist relations of production and a substantively democratic political space? In order to answer this question, however, it is necessary to try and understand how common emancipatory projects and solidarity links might be discovered or created by ordinary people who are constantly faced with two kinds of work: the everyday work of earning a livelihood and imagining a future for their children, and the work of fighting to change a reality of hardship and uncertainty. This duality in turn relates to different forms of engaging struggle: through an immediate claim for resources and targeted changes –particular interests and claims, linked to direct experience—on the one hand, or through a long term organized force towards structural transformation in the general interest, on the other. It therefore refers to the immanent tension between the particular experience of dispossession and the more abstract argument (or category) that enables the

communication and sharing of it, and eventually the construction of a larger structure –a theory-- where the particular position makes sense and which should be transformed.

Experience, abstraction, struggles and theories

This tension was repeatedly underlined by Raymond Williams in several political essays (1989) when trying to make sense of what the struggle for socialism had to be in the present (late twentieth century). His analysis was based on the case of Britain's developments (e.g. the Thatcher reforms, the miners' strike, the gradualism of the Labour Party and its abandonment of a real socialist transformation) and on his experience as a border person, having been raised in a small community in South Wales later to go on to one of the centers of abstract thinking (Cambridge). It is from this border position that he explained two different kinds of feelings of responsibility, two different modes of "community": a) one linked to a [rural] place and to immediate proximity, to the "recognition of certain kinds of mutual responsibility" and of "a level of social obligation which was conferred by the fact of seeming to live in the same place and in that sense to have a common identity" and b) another one [industrial] linked with more abstract forces which nevertheless had concrete, and place-bound effects: "a community that had been hammered out in very fierce conflict, the kind of community that was the eventual positive creation of struggles within the industrialization of South Wales." (1989 [1977]:114). For Raymond Williams, however, present day historical realities forced the need of abstraction and a politics of negation (of immediate experience) that came with it:

"Something had happened which put certain of the basic elements of our social life beyond the reach both of direct experience and of simple affirmation, affirmation followed by extension. In came, necessarily, the politics of negation, the politics of differentiation, the politics of abstract

analysis. And these, whether we liked them or not, were now necessary even to understand what was happening. (...) New characteristic social relations which have, in a sense, to be discovered, not only by factual enquiry but by very complex interpretation, discovering all kinds of new systems and modes. And these things which are the determining tendencies in modern history can be put into conflict with those other affirmative notions which, whether they come from older kinds of rural communities or from militant working-class communities, are always more closely tied to experience. And around them still centres the notion of community, contrasted now to what? Often I found, as this argument continued, contrasted with ‘real politics’ or ‘practical politics’.” (1989 [1977]:116)

What appears then is that, often, these more abstract realities are pictured as “real politics” or “practical politics”, that is, the politics of the organizations (mainly the party and unions) and *confronted* to the politics tied to “communities”. It is this tension between the real weight of abstraction in our lives, and the immediacy of experience that Williams sought to capture in the dialectics of affirmation (experience, community, the extension of community) and negation (distance, abstraction, practical politics) in the struggle for socialism. The process of “negation” (the method of abstraction) was in itself a part of the hegemony of capitalism, and had not yielded the expected results (through Labour party politics), but the process of simple community “affirmation” (the method of experience and place proximity) was also inadequate for the struggle to be successful:

“we have learned all too harshly and bitterly the truth of these latest phase, the phase of negation, the phase of knowing that you have to go beyond the simple community, the phase of the quick identification of enemies, the

phase also of very conscious and prolonged political abstraction. If we merely counterpose to that the forms of a simpler kind of politics, I very much doubt if we shall engage in the central struggle. On the other hand, if that negative politics is the only politics then it is the final victory of a mode of thought which seems to me the ultimate product of capitalist society. Whatever its political label it is a mode of thought which really has made relations between men into relations between things or relations between concepts. And yet to re-establish the notion of politics as relationships between men, to re-establish the ideas of community politics, would mean superseding, going beyond, that kind [117] of politics rather than merely in turn negating it.” (1989 [1977]:117-118).

In a very central way, this became the issue that had to be resolved for orienting and waging a successful struggle for a different –a socialist—society. It is in this mind frame that he developed his concept of “militant particularism” that I will be engaging with in this chapter. The concept tries to deal with this tension, which is also the tension of defining a project that can be shared. It points to the need to find the general interest in the particular interests of communities struggling for a better life: the question of survival of particular communities becomes not a special case but a general case, reviving the labor *movement* by driving at the general interest through the particular claims of, for example, the mining communities in the 1980s (1989 [1985]:125-127). Instead of negating the particular through a superior set of abstract concepts defining the general interests of the “economy” or the “nation”,

“the unique and extraordinary character of working-class self-organization has been that it has tried to connect particular struggles to a general struggle in one quite special way. It has set out, as a movement, to make real what is

at first sight the extraordinary claim that the defence and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact in the general interest. That, after all, is the moment of transition to an idea of socialism.” (1989 [1981]:249).

However, it is the struggle for that moment of transition to the *idea* of socialism that has been largely lost by working-class organizations today and needs to be reconstructed through a “necessary and workable settlement between particular interests and the general interest” (1989 [1981]:254). For Williams the problem with Labour in its institutional forms (party, union) has been their transformation into “part of the mechanism of a modern capitalist society” (1989 [1981]:250). Only the immediate experience of particular interests has preserved the truth of the socialist version of the general interest, “yet not consciously, not at the level of argument, only really at the level of feeling, of mood” (1989 [1981]:254). It is , then, from this position that “the concept of a practical and possible general interest, which really does include all reasonable particular interests, has to be negotiated, found, agreed, constructed.” (1989 [1981]:255). In the end, in Williams’ view, both the “affirmative” aspect of experience in immediate struggles, and the abstract intellectual “negation” of distanced analysis were necessary to construct “in convincing detail (...) the general shape of the new social order” (1989 [1981]:255).

This debate, however, was a political one in which academics in the left were trying to make sense of the actual role of institutions that were meant to represent working-class interests (Labour party, the unions), the significance of new social movements appearing in the 1960s and 1970s (anti-Vietnam war, civil rights movement, feminist movement, environmental movement) and the substance of class as a category and a praxis defining a collective movement. The debate, of which Williams was part,

expressed a dissatisfaction over the formal institutions of Labour and a need to understand new forms of conflict within capitalist societies. In the wake of the systemic turn of the 1970s, after the termination of the Bretton Woods system and the liberalization of exchange and financial markets that ensued, Labour institutions became increasingly co-opted in what was described as neo-corporatist regimes, based on agreement seeking through institutional negotiation within the existing social framework, instead of seeking a total transformation of the system through sustained conflict and an idea of socialism. For those involved in the debates the issues were: 1) was class an abstract category or was it a praxis?, 2) what was the articulation between experience (immediate struggles) and formal organizations (political struggles), between particular and general interests?, 3) and what was the link between concrete and abstract understandings of class position (structures of feeling, class consciousness)? The thread connecting these different questions was the tension that Williams tried to confront between the concrete and the abstract in the lived experience of class, but also the need to incorporate this duality (concrete/ abstract) in any organization that really expressed the interests of the dispossessed. E.P. Thompson discredited French Marxist structuralism for understanding class as an abstract structural category (in the *Poverty of Theory*, 1978), and proposed instead an understanding of class that was tied to concrete collective action and struggles, that would eventually build up a culture of class, where social situations would acquire a shared meaning (Thompson 1966). Hobsbawm's (1984 [1971]) position was, on the contrary, that:

“class has two levels of aspiration (...) the immediate, day-by-day specific demands and the more general demands for the kind of society which suits it” (:26). “Working class consciousness at both levels implies formal

organization; and organization which is itself the carrier of class ideology, which without it would be little more than a complex of informal habits and practices” (:27). “‘Socialist consciousness’ through organization is thus an essential complement of working-class consciousness. But it is neither automatic nor inevitable” (:28). “The necessary mediation of organization implies a difference, (...) a divergence, between ‘class’ and ‘organization’, i.e. on the political level, ‘party’. The further we move from the elementary social units and situations in which class and organization mutually control one another –e.g. in the classic case, the socialist or communist union lodge in the mining village—and into the vast and complex area where major decisions about society are taken, the greater the potential divergence” (1984 [1971]:28).

What Hobsbawm stresses also through the historical example of “The Making of the Working Class 1870-1914” (1984 [1981]) in a direct critique of Thompson is that organizations (mass unions, Labour party) are central to the development of class consciousness, and of class as a collective force and as a movement with direction. Organizations are also key in training and framing the leaders that emerge in concrete mobilizations during immediate struggles, but they also produce particularly formalized kinds of leaders for institutional aims (1984 [1981]: 210). As different from spontaneous and reactive forms of protest by subaltern groups, class becomes a subject of history *only* when it is formalized. However, often organizations acquire dynamics of their own tied to long-term perspectives of their institutional social reproduction that might get in the way of effective mobilization in the interest of ordinary workers (1984 [1977]:293). What the organizations of the left provide is their capacity to produce policies and bodies capable of implementing them from within the system (1984 [1977]:

295). It is both Thompson and Hobsbawm's positions that Williams tried to supersede through retaining the contradiction between concrete and abstract, particular and general, immediate and organized struggle as central to the socialist *idea* and project.

These various strands of theory have in common their central preoccupation with the possible forms of struggle, with trying to understand what makes oppressed and exploited people come together, how they attempt to transform their situation in a durable way, and in what direction, following what design of a society. Struggle has often been defined as the necessary process by which spaces of possibility are opened for those that were excluded from them. It is the means toward increased inclusion in the polity and in civil society. Struggles attempt to force participation through confrontation and mobilization that may push towards the transformation of the rules that frame social interaction. Struggle is about conflict and about how conflict is defined. William Roseberry, in his "Hegemony and the language of contention" pointed to the fact that "unity is [for both the ruling and the subaltern classes] a political and cultural problem" (1994:359). It is in the light of this central problem that hegemony appears as a process of construction of the languages, contours, and practices of struggle, in an always changing confrontation between dominant and subaltern subjects. However, as Roseberry reminds us, "The concept's value for Gramsci [when trying to understand the *failure* of the Piedmont bourgeoisie to lead and form a unified nation-state] lay in its illumination of lines of weakness and cleavage, of alliances unformed and class fractions unable to make their particular interests appear as the interests of a wider collectivity" (:365). For anyone observing the situation of subaltern classes in Europe, the issue of cleavages emerging as against union, is central. For anyone even remotely interested in changing the direction of the distributive structure, not to mention

a more profound transformation, it becomes imperative to analyze what are the conditions of possibility of struggles being waged today in Europe. What I will trace in this article is the connection between the historical production of shared identities and particular collectives of struggle –militant particularism--, and the experienced structure of present-day capitalism in an industrial town in Southern Europe.

In Ferrol, as elsewhere in Europe, the issue is to think through the processes people engage in and the instruments that people develop in their struggle to try and control their lives. What we see emerge from the ethnography, however, is that these processes are disharmonious and contradictory, and do not produce unity or orientation in and of themselves. I want to address this through the exploration of three axes that emerge from my fieldwork and explain the construction of structures of feeling: *history*, the understanding of a logical structure to the development of events in the past leading to the present; *suffering*, as a psycho-physical fact and interpretation of the position of the self in the real world; and *collective identity*, as a constructed means to make sense of, and interact with, forces that appear too impersonal and abstract to be dealt with otherwise. In this particular location, industrial Ferrol, these axes are locally depicted as “defeat”, “suffering” and “struggle”. Defeat describes an *understanding* of the Transition from Franco’s dictatorship to parliamentary democracy (1975-1982) in terms of hopes and expectations of socialism that were disappointed. Suffering expresses the *embodiment* of workers’ work experience, of mobilization and repression and of the recognition of defeat. Struggle tells about collective *action* aimed at transforming the existing situation into a better one; about hope and project for a better future in the general interest. Memory emerges as the bridge that enables people to link these different scales, define projects and stabilize boundaries for struggle.

Defeat, suffering, and struggle

History

The aftermath of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) transformed the realities of making a living for everyone in the country. The industrial town of Ferrol had a past of socialist, communist and anarchist working class organizations before the war which resulted in a strong repression after Franco's victory. However, the importance attributed to the shipyards by the regime had the somewhat paradoxical effect of creating a strong and organized working class movement.

The impact of the nationalist economy policies of the early Franco regime, favored an import substitution program that aimed at strengthening the country's industrial base. The regime became a peculiar mix of repression and paternalism for the working classes (Babiano 1993). Repression was extreme during the war in the areas under the control of the "National" francoist army and during the first ten years after the Civil War ended (1939-1949). It included summary executions, prison, concentration camps and work camps, together with systematic encouragement of denunciations of republicans or "reds" and continuous surveillance by the police of the conduct and political affinities of citizens. It also implied massive purges in private and public workplaces of workers that had mobilized for the Republic or the Revolution and against the Francoist "National" rebels. In the private industry, purges applied mostly to workers that were imprisoned or in exile as a result of the conflict. In the public sector, a law-decree (*Decreto-ley*) of 25th August 1939 reserved 80% of employment in the civil service to "ex-combatants, disabled veterans, ex-prisoners of war, orphans and kinspersons of the 'fallen'" in the National side during the war (Riquer 2010:153). At the same time, employers were legally forbidden to dismiss workers for economic reasons³ without government permission and had to pay a strong indemnity while workforce minimums were statutory, established and enforced for all firms by the government. While

protecting male employment the National Catholic regime obstructed female employment especially after marriage. Strikes were illegal and severely repressed, free unionization was forbidden, salaries were tightly controlled, inflation deteriorated their value and rationing provided scarcely at controlled prices while black market prices rocketed (Molinero & Ysàs 1993, Molinero 1990; Vilar 2004; Riquer 2010).

Employment stability became the programmatic hallmark of labor relations during the regime and produced a system of internal labor market where sons entered as apprenticeships in their fathers' firms, especially in the large strategic industries. This was coupled with a closing of the labor market to women whose main calling was defined as housework.

The participation of the state in heavy industries grew constantly until the end of the regime in 1975 and continued growing through the restructuring of the early 1980s until the privatization years in the 1990s.⁴ In relation to economic policies, two different periods of trade closure can be defined in the first twenty years after the Civil War, 1) Autarky (*Falangista*, model of self-sustaining economic autonomy) (1939-1946) 2) Import substitution (1946-1959), aimed at developing industry in order to achieve competitiveness. This second period led to gradual liberalization after 1953 and the Madrid treaties with the United States. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later World Bank) wrote a report on Spain (1963) prescribing the articulation of monetary stabilization policies, liberalization of trade and foreign investment, deregulation of labor market, while it opened the aid credit. It can be said that starting in 1959 the economic policies of the Spanish francoist governments (referred to as "technocrats") follow the model of development that the US had exported to the rest of Western Europe after World War II (WWII). However, this liberalization model was compatible with state intervention intended to regulate the excesses of the

market but not to substitute for it. “Indicative planning” was a model of economic regulation that initiated in France after WWII linked to post-war reconstruction, but which had intellectual antecedents both in right wing corporatist ideas as well as in soviet socialist central planning of the inter-war period (Ramos Gorostiza & Pires Jiménez 2009). One of its major proponents was Jean Monnet one of the founders of the European Economic Community (EEC). It was mostly meant as a technical device based on macroeconomic data (input-output tables, national accounting) that would enable economic actors to make rational decisions. The state’s role was to gather and make available this macroeconomic information and to coordinate the national economy and its different sectors in relation to long-term economic development targets. The state’s intervention had to interfere minimally with market forces, but it had to make decisions as to which “sectors” of the economy should receive incentives because they were thought to represent the ground base of any further development. Spain following the French model of “Development Plans” centered in strong key industries (steel, energy, shipbuilding) that would be given preference by the state. Indicative planning was a model widely discussed by European nations after WWII, and it had the acquiescence of the US reconstruction planners. In its 1963 report, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development supported the adoption of “indicative planning” as a way to liberalization and economic development for Spain. The results of development plans for Spain in the 1960s decade have been strongly criticized by Spanish economists on various grounds, however, mostly stressing their inefficiency and constraints to full liberalization (Ramos Gorostiza & Pires Jiménez 2009).

Indicative planning did have two fundamental consequences that are central for the discussion in this chapter. First, it introduced a particular *technical* language into economic practice, one that seemed to supersede the political language that had infused

economic thinking and decisions up to that moment (*Falangista*, Socialist, Communist, Anarchist). Macroeconomic data were to be the guides of economic policies and they appeared as devoid of political intention while the group of economists that came to power with that project were aptly called “the technocrats”, foreshadowing the neoliberal arguments for a politics of austerity today.⁵ Macroeconomic arguments would eventually become such a hegemonic force as to pervade the discourse of democratic trade unions putting an end to the revolutionary aspect of unions that had re-emerged during the Franco regime (Martínez-Alier & Roca Jusmet 1988). Second, indicative planning, through favoring the key sector industries that were also those that could benefit from economies of scale and Fordist modernization, gave workers in these industries a job that was protected not only through labor laws but also through longer-term economic policies. Indeed, the articulation of production and consumption that is the hallmark of Fordist organization, trading stable employment and better wages for increased productivity, which creates a simultaneous rise in demand and supply and a dream of middle class aspirations, was tied in Spain to the “strategic” industries and framed in a context of repression. Some of these industries had been nationalized (such as the military shipyards) but those that were private also benefited from special state support and protection. As a result, workers’ position was strengthened within these sectors and eventually enabled the reconstruction of class based trade unions.

These modernizing plans were undertaken by the victorious side of a Civil War that had been mostly a Class War, aimed at the suppression of alternative (socialist, anarchist) models of political economic organization, and in an environment of absolute political repression. Liberalization of the economy was a first step and signaled the regime’s intention of siding with the “free” world in the polarized environment of the Cold War. Nevertheless, if the aim at integration with western international powers was to become

a reality some political gestures toward democratization should be forthcoming.⁶

During the “development” decade (1960s), government intervention was progressively reduced and committees representing workers within large (over 500 workers) firms became legal within the framework of the corporatist “vertical” national union. The turning point appeared with the *Ley de Convenios Colectivos* (Law of Collective Agreements) of April 1958 that established the legality of *economic*—as distinct from political—collective action as part of the process of negotiation of workers with firms. In the following years the institutional framework of labor committees enabled workers to legally organize and voice collective claims (Sánchez Recio 2002). These worker committees, democratically elected by workers, negotiated in-firm collective agreements with representatives of the enterprises and under state supervision. After 1965 “economic” strikes were de-penalized although unions will remain illegal until Franco’s death in 1975. During this period, the argument of “modernization” was central to the liberal political economists (most of them members of the Opus Dei Catholic congregation⁷) in Spanish Governments from 1957 up to 1982 and the advent of the socialist party to power (Viñas 2003, González 1979, Anderson 1970, Graham 1999).

In the Ferrol shipyards, a sustained expansion of demand conjuncture until the early 1970s provided male jobs and decent wages from one generation to the next and reinforced the effects of state protection to a “strategic” industry. Both state intervention and a favorable market conjuncture contributed to stabilize workers expectations. Stable employment lasted until the early 1980s and was crucial in the re-emergence of a clandestine but very active class based trade union (Comisiones Obreras, CCOO) in the early 1960s. Many today speak of that past situation of shipyard workers as one of privilege, but it was the result of a particular historical conjuncture and of struggle. It

was the organization of the labor movement in class terms within the “vertical” corporatist union of the francoist regime, by a coalition of social Catholic, Communist and Anarchist groupings, that enabled workers in the “strategic” industries to better their salaries and work conditions. Annual collective bargaining became established in all sectors of heavy industry by the early 1960s. Often these were moments of strikes and violent confrontation that developed a particular male identity centred on values of justice, struggle and solidarity among peers. Clandestine union leaders were in and out of prison continuously during the 1960s and early 1970s. In Ferrol, in early March 1972 the negotiation of a collective agreement resulted in numerous strikes and demonstrations that were severely repressed leading to the death of two workers and 16 wounded on the 10th, while more than 100 strikers were put under arrest, 60 imprisoned and 160 disciplinary redundancies occurred. Those involved in the organization of the movement were put in the black list. In commemoration of this, March 10th became instituted as the day of the Galician worker. The shipyard union became the model for the entire working class in Ferrol and was very active at organizing other local industrial struggles.

After transition to democracy, the first socialist government of president Felipe González initiated re-structuring of all national state industries preparing Spain for incorporation into the European Economic Community and the free market challenge of competitiveness. Complying with demands from Brussels, the shipyards were brutally downsized. From 1984 to 1987 thousands of jobs were lost; unemployment and early retirement became a generalized feature in the region. While the economic rationale for restructuring was generally accepted by unions as the “need” to transform what was admitted to be an inefficient industrial system resulting from the state intervention policies of the preceding regime, workers asked for better conditions of severance and

unemployment coverage, as well as guarantees that new industries would be developed in the old industrial areas. Labor conflict increased during those restructuring years and unions succeeded in obtaining better overall conditions for those made redundant, but this appeared to many as a trade off for becoming a new type of union, a “responsible” union in the context of Europe, in fact explicitly abandoning the revolutionary path. During the Transition period the unions had become progressively bureaucratized after the Moncloa agreement (*Pacto(s) de la Moncloa*, 1977) and generally compliant with the macroeconomic technical projections of the economists, their growth objective, competitive arguments and European integration interest. The Pacto de la Moncloa was a political agreement to stabilize the economy, signed by the major political parties (including the communist party and Catalan and Basque nationalist parties) on October 1977. It had the tacit support of the unions and rested on the shared objective of making the transition to democracy possible. The “Raison d’État” of the political transition and the fear of involution appeared to all as a strong argument for the agreement. In a conjuncture of high inflation (27%) the Moncloa agreement was aimed at containing salaries and increasing productivity to enhance competitiveness and stimulate growth. The practice of “agreements” between employers, workers’ unions and the state has since become strongly instituted in Spanish economic policy.

The early Transition years (1975-1976) had seen the power of the unions increase⁸ and openly express (through strikes and demonstrations) both political objectives (democracy, free unions, legalization of the Communist party) and labor and social issues (salaries on a mobile scale, better working conditions, social benefits). This had resulted in a progressively better distribution of work rents to capital rents in the GDP up to 1977, with real salaries following the increases in productivity. From then on, work rents would decrease steadily as a result of salaries stagnating or even decreasing

while productivity continued to increase (Martínez-Alier & Roca Jusmet 1988: 52; Zaragoza & Varela 1990:61, Gutiérrez 1990: 122-26). The Pacto de la Moncloa, and all the subsequent agreements that were subscribed by unions⁹ and employers under the supervision of the State, had as their main objective wage contention in order to control inflation and foster economic recuperation (Zaragoza 1990). The politics of “agreement” [*concertación*] between the different agents of the economy have been described as neo-corporatist because they implied the loss of a revolutionary objective and the incorporation of trade unions into the neoliberal policies of democratic governments: “neo-corporatist structures also assimilate politics to the economy in another sense, because macroeconomic orientations become the basis of social agreements” (Martínez-Alier & Roca Jusmet 1988:59).¹⁰ The process of cooptation of labor conflict by the technical guidelines of macroeconomic planning pursued the way it had initiated during the technocratic governments of the Franco regime. This situation produced an hegemony that would frame industrial worker’s protest and struggles in a particular “language of contention” (Roseberry 1994) that was that of the dominant groups but appeared to be neutral, technical and universal:

“The macroeconomic reasoning and objectives, which appear a lot more neutral [than traditional corporative ideologies] might better serve the aim of getting trade union leaders to accept ‘social peace’ and convince their followers, so long as they abandon the Marxist or anarcho-syndicalist language and start discussing about how much should the inflation rate be reduced or how much should the GDP increase.” (Martínez-Alier & Roca Jusmet 1988: 56)

This trend of technical reasoning and justification has continued until the present, through various moments of re-structuring and job loss in the 1990s and 2000s that have

seen how workers' struggles were driven towards negotiation and agreement by the unions.

By 2009 the structure of the shipyard industry in Ferrol had become a flexible one relying on a network of subcontracting auxiliary firms. Parallel to this transformation, the region has experienced the increase of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) mostly in textile and garment manufacturing and in service sectors, in new industrial parks surrounding the town of Ferrol (such as Narón). These “new” jobs are addressed to women and younger people and are highly volatile and unprotected. Little unionization or collective action mark this new area of employment where a stronger sense of individual strategizing and networking is the main instrument of social mobility. In economic terms there is a demise of the traditional “fordist” shipyard industry and an emergence of a “flexible” regionally integrated structure of SME. For most people job precariousness and career instability render prevision for the future very difficult. Migration to the big cities of Madrid, Barcelona or London has soared for young people in this region in the last ten years as they attempt to find better opportunities in urban centers. Today, Ferrol is the town in Spain with the second largest emigration rate, and over a third of its households live from a state subsidy, often that of an older generation that accessed early retirement in the re-structuring struggles of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

Defeat

The concept of defeat appeared during my fieldwork associated with the understanding of experiences related to the Transition and the restructuring years. It produced a particular framework for capturing the logic of the present in relation to the events of the past. This reasoning of historical experience was one of the aspects entangled in the

local structures of feeling of the working class that enable or inhibit solidarity and mobilization.

Early in my fieldwork (2003), in a debate around memories of the past and political activism organized by a cultural association in Ferrol, Raúl,¹¹ one of the leaders of the working class movement of the 1960s and 1970s, said:

“[in the 1960s] anarchists, communists and socialists had different experiences [of the Republic and Civil War period] it was very difficult to make them agree... [We had to do] invisible underground work in order to produce the new working class movement out of all these different opinions. Many have contributed to this final result: to bring the dictatorship to an end.” (R., 2003).

This is a very succinct statement of what seems to have been one of the grounds for overcoming cleavages in the past: the fight for democracy. In the same meeting however, several people started voicing what would become a leitmotiv throughout these years: that the fight had, in the end, been lost.

There was a sense of defeat, their defeat as the working class and as the “left”, but also a defeat of a particular idea of democracy, that of *popular sovereignty* going beyond institutional forms. And both these aspects were linked, because, as Raúl declared in 2010 “the War [Civil War] was lost by the working class, not by the Republic”. The aim in recuperating democracy was to widen the spaces of struggle for the working class, the spaces of solidarity, of respect and of hope. The generation now in their 70s feels they were deceived by political leaders: “We became orphans of the left, we gave everything, we believed in people who today are not on our side” (L., 2003). Prominent leaders of the left during the transition came into power in 1982 only to conduct industrial restructuring and destroy thousands of jobs in Ferrol. The expectations of

democracy were misleading, remarks María, an activist woman: “We thought that through voting for those parties we believed in, they would be doing the work [for us], but that did not happen. We made ourselves comfortable; we thought that we didn’t have to keep fighting, because they were there to do the job.” (M., 2005). Here, she expresses a perception that the fault lay also with the working class for abandoning their active participation in the hands of formal institutions such as parties and unions. By legalizing unions and parties, channels for conflict expression were constitutionally regulated: “democracy” not only produced the demobilization of the working class it produced a profession out of political activism, and a “realist politics”. Union and party representatives became “experts” in “politics”, distancing themselves from ordinary people’s experiences and preoccupations.

The older generation was able to produce a unity during the Franco years and against all odds, by agreeing that working class struggle was foremost a fight for democracy and against the dictatorship. During the Transition, all over Spain, the left very soon discovered the fragmentation produced by a battle around new interests and resources that often pit the old allies against each other. The popular saying “*Contra Franco vivíamos mejor*” [Against Franco we fared better], common by the early 1980s, expressed growing cleavages and the reconfiguration of the stakes at play. In Ferrol, the generation that reconstructed a unified class struggle during the 1960s is defined by the next generation (now in their forties) in ambiguous terms: they appear as an heroic group of people, a collection of significant personalities that were able to powerfully transmit their analysis of the situation and engage the solidarity of everyone in the region; they are also described as the “lost generation”, the generation that lost the transition challenge, the generation of unionists that were trapped literally in the industrial restructuring that destroyed the shipyards: they lost their jobs while the

increasingly fragmented structures of production impaired the capacity of unions to organize.

In any case, there is a general agreement in seeing the present as a loss in relation, first, to the unfulfilled expectations of the Transition; second, in relation to what did get accomplished in those years in respect to the rights of workers and civil liberties; third, in relation to the promised stabilization of the economic situation after the tough years of restructuring; and fourth in relation to the unity and solidarity of the workers' movement during the dictatorship. As a retired worker who had a son working in one of the subcontract auxiliary firms for the shipyard put it:

“In the last twenty years workers have lost 40% of their conquests. People work without social security, without labor security. Young people have to accept precarious jobs, dangerous jobs in the shipyards. The unions cannot do much in the small auxiliary firms, workers don't find support when they have a problem, there is competition among workers and there is no solidarity. But these are all workers' problems...” M. B., 2003).

The precarity that the young generation endures appears here as the mirror of a double loss, that of the social and labor conquests that were obtained through hard struggles, and that of the capacity for engaging in that form of struggle in the present, for lack of solidarity. Indeed the youngest generation, in their twenties, is also defined as a “lost generation” in that their fragmentation is complete and their confidence gone. They are individualists, they go it alone. They don't trust the unions because they see them as corrupt. In the words of Juli, in his late twenties and a union member: “Mine is an unbelieving generation. Politics is of no use to solve problems. Everything remains the same whoever is in power (*gobierne quien gobierne*).” (J., 2007). This disbelief is an expression of the failure of the heroic generation that produced a strong working class

union during the dictatorship. It underscores their failure to produce a real democracy, where “politics” –institutional channels and representatives-- would make a difference. It very explicitly refers to their defeat in material terms –what they did not, in the end, accomplish. But it also refers to their inability to transmit their values, their tools of analysis, their conscience and their consciousness to the next generations. Above all, it points to their shortcomings to transmit the capacity for struggle. The clear sentiment that, as María said, “Perhaps we have been unable to transmit it” (M., 2005) gets repeated over and over by the elders as a “*mea culpa*”. These difficulties of transmission are in part related to the consequences of the restructuring period on the training system of the shipyard, that dismantled the apprentice school and the mentorship process that had structured intergenerational knowledge transfers within the factory. Indeed, for the older generation, this mentorship system is described as crucial in their political initiation: they learned the trade together with particular ways of analyzing their position in the world.

The import substitution period of the dictatorship, and the particular structure of state industries that were considered “strategic” for the development and security of the nation (energy, steel, chemicals, coal, and military industries) created the perfect space for transmission. Because these industries required specialized workers, training was provided in “apprenticeship schools” (*escuelas de aprendices*) within the factory.

Instruction seems to have been excellent in many accounts although infused with Falangist rituals and ideology. The last two years (out of four spent in apprenticeship) were spent learning the trade by teaming with senior mentors in the shipyard workshops. Workers speak of it as a “University” (sic) where, together with the practicalities of the trade, they learned about past history, politics, society and culture. There was a clandestine library in the shipyard where they could read forbidden works

(in their words: “From Marx to Lorca”). Here they found the transmission of memories of struggle, they learned about labor strikes during the Republic (1934), they learned about confrontations among the left during the Revolution and the Civil War (1938), learned about the repression that was particularly devastating in the area, but also about anti-colonial struggles abroad, about civil rights movements, etc. All of it contributed to a widening of their understandings of conflict and to the capacity to address more abstract scales of struggle. Moreover, this was not only a theoretical transmission of knowledge but one that was put to practice constantly through the analysis of present day situations and the design for action and solidarity with other mobilizations. Some of these mentors in the shipyard have become heroic symbols (Julio Aneiros, for example, who was defined as a mentor by many was a member of the clandestine communist party and a key actor in the reorganization of a class based union in the 1960s). One can easily follow the lineages of mentorship up to the present because all politically active workers will voice them explicitly. The vocational school was transformed into a short-term training space in the 1980s when workers were hired already holding degrees from technical schools, and was finally closed in the early 1990s, coinciding with the second restructuring period. The shipyard space (Bazán) remained for a while the working class “University” through the union activism of the restructuring years making transmission of “social conscience” still possible. However, after the second wave of restructuring was finished, in the late 1990s, two generations of mentors had disappeared and the structure of the industry was fragmented in a multitude of small auxiliary firms which were positioned differently in the physical and social space of shipbuilding. For Raúl, the early retirement aspect of restructuring was planned as to separate the leaders that had been active during the Transition from the following generations of workers. It sought to disrupt transmission chains and it succeeded.

In these circumstances, their reading of history situates the generation who struggled during the dictatorship as losers, even when they thought they had accomplished their objective by attaining democracy and what came with it: free unions, the legalization of the communist party and civil rights.

Suffering

The material aspects of this loss are the basis for what they define as “suffering”. This concept refers to the embodied realities of being part of the working class and it reveals an important aspect of the structures of feeling that can be shared and mobilized to produce a collective identity. For an industrial town such as Ferrol, the restructuring periods of the 1980s and 1990s, had a major impact on the livelihoods of most households. This has produced a pervasive sense of fear (*miedo*) and pain. In the context of recent political and economic transformations the meaning of fear has changed from a mostly political¹² to a mostly economic value form while retaining a logic of dismantling organized working-class struggle: from fear of repression during Franco, to fear of economic destitution in the present. Those with permanent employment are afraid of losing their jobs. They are afraid the shipyard won’t get any new orders and the menace of total closure looms. Casual workers are afraid of not being re-hired. Workers in the small auxiliary firms are afraid these will shut down, move elsewhere or find a cheaper workforce. During the year 2012, more than 1000 direct jobs were lost, all of them in the auxiliary companies that are subcontracted to work in the shipyard. Precarity is becoming widespread and young people are increasingly dependent on subsidies or migrate.¹³ Parents are afraid their children won’t get proper jobs or any jobs at all and that they will have to leave, as many are doing. Many households live off the pensions of the workers that were forced into early retirement. In between

precarious jobs people live from unemployment benefits. They are afraid the State will cut down social benefits and this is indeed occurring with the structural adjustment cuts imposed by the European Commission since 2011. Young people cannot leave their parent's home; they cannot have children; they remain dependent. One of them explains:

“There are very few casual workers that are unionized, because of fear.

Nobody wants to go in the list [of the union] because you have to show your face and confront the company. We are moving back in time. They want to destroy the stability conquered by the labor movement. When you see that, you are afraid. You live to the limits. You live with fear. You don't even dream of having a child or of buying a car.” (J. C., 2006).

For a town that had stable employment and accomplished gains in social benefits for almost half a century this has come as a shock. Indeed it has come as a counter intuitive reality: democracy has led to a disaster situation in their material economic conditions, but also in that institutional channels allegedly opened to facilitate the struggle to gain control over their lives, have in fact become dead-ends. “People are afraid: those that are meant to defend you are not going to defend you” says Xaime, a radical union leader (2006). He then describes how political parties are only interested in getting power, they have lost touch with ordinary people's problems, and they don't care. Unions are bureaucratized, and they lack an alternative project. They submit to the arguments of employers (labor market de-regulation, increases in productivity, job flexibility) and to the state's macroeconomic analysis and neoliberal projects. They are seen as profiteering from the fragmented and precarious labor market structure, where they increasingly function as a “placing agency” using clientelist procedures, through their statutory participation in the Instituto Nacional de Empleo (INEM) [National

Employment Institute], and make money through their control over occupational retraining courses tied to unemployment benefits. In fact, the participation of trade unions, together with the employers' associations, in the national institutions related with employment and retraining programs was a result of the neo-corporatist agreements during the early 1980s as a trade-off for accepting restructuring policies. The relative power of unions as an institution in the official employment organisms sets union bureaucrats in a patron-client relation with the mass of ordinary members, and it protects unions against internal democracy and discourages dissidence within, while another form of fear creeps in. Xaime, leader of a critical faction (Trotskyite) of the major union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO-Críticos), explains a recent conflict in an auxiliary company. Five groups of workers (totaling around sixty individuals) started legal action against the main shipbuilding company Navantia (the old Bazán, state owned) on the grounds of "labor lending" [*prestamismo laboral*], a form of illegal subcontracting where *de facto* employee-employer relations are with the main company and not with the subcontractor. With this legal action, workers had bypassed the unions, who didn't like this. The nationalist union Confederación Intersindical Galega (CIG) tried to dissuade them and, confronted by their decisiveness, told them not to use the legal frame of "collective conflict" but to present demands individually, which they did and lost their cases. In Xaime's opinion, the union committee assumes the production model based on subcontracting, and supports the company's decisions while monopolizing collective action. However, he understands the issue as a structural one reflecting the fact that unions have not been able to organize the auxiliary industry (whose individual firm size is too small) into a strong unified union movement that jointly addresses the problems of auxiliaries. The unions in these private firms need to coordinate with those of the main shipyard which is state owned (and colloquially called

the “*principal*”) because they are an integral part of it irrespective of the legal fragmentation. Their problems are articulated and the struggle should be coordinated. In a pamphlet written in July 2006 at the height of the conflict with an auxiliary firm, Nervión, the critical Trotskyite magazine *El Militante*¹⁴ expressed:

“This strike reveals an important aspect: that the auxiliary companies are now part of the labor movement of this factory in equal footing with those of the *principal*. (...) It is imperative that (...) a *coordinating committee of auxiliary companies* is instituted that enables to address their problems in a global manner and that holds the representation of all the companies. This will also permit a better coordination with the union committee in the *principal*, something necessary as this strike has shown us.” (stress in the original).

But this unity is yet to materialize. This real pain of fear and betrayal is compared with other forms of suffering in the past. The suffering of the heroic generation fighting the Franco police: many were tortured and imprisoned, some died when demonstrations were repressed (1972). Women talk about the suffering of the wives of these fighters who lost their men as husbands and fathers to the demanding hours and dangers of political struggle. This created an intimate distress within the family produced by the tension between what women perceived as the abstract collective fight of men, versus their own personal immediate struggles to get by everyday. Most shipyard workers’ spouses were fulltime housewives. Their view of the struggle differed markedly from that of working women in other local industries, such as canneries (see Narotzky 2010). The latter fought with their comrades in the battlefield while the former preserved the rearguard in an ambivalent space between the intimacies of family reproduction and the public militancy of support to the fighters (providing for them and the family while they

were in prison, for example). The difference between past and present suffering seems to be one of purpose. *Then*, suffering was directed toward an identifiable goal, it was part of the struggle, it led towards a better future, it was worth it. Suffering *now*, however, appears as a function of defeat, of passive acceptance of what is perceived as overwhelming forces: the market, the economy, the European Union.

Faced with the betrayal of institutions, workers try to explain what is amiss, when and why their elected representatives stopped caring for them and how to redress the situation. The major point that is underlined over and over is that these elected representatives lost touch with the immediate reality of work and hardship. This is explained as a result of being given time-off and even total release from work when they became officially elected union leaders, a legally recognized right that is meant to compensate for the hours dedicated to union work. The argument is that they lost touch from ordinary hardship when they got paid for being union representatives, when they started thinking of themselves as “politicians” instead of workers. Social distancing mirrored spatial separation, office work instead of work in the shop or the workshops. And in the process they “lost their soul” because they did not suffer what their fellow workers suffered, they became part of an institution instead of “real people”. Now they are alienated from the rank-and-file.

But suffering also has its positive side. Those in the younger generation who try to organize some sense of collective purpose put suffering as the cornerstone of any possible unity, they say: “In order to struggle and make things better one must suffer them” (J. P., 2007) or “People believe in those that suffer with them” (M. C., 2010). So collective suffering, the shared embodiment of work and hardship, is seen as being the basis for any possible collective identity and action. And purposeful suffering, sacrifice, becomes a means to an end: “Without sacrifice there is no victory” (C. F., 2010)

Struggle

The last aspect involved in creating the structures of feeling of workers in Ferrol is struggle itself, as it participates in the production of a collective identity that can be mobilized for transforming reality. Struggles waged in the present refer to past modes of collective identity formation both as models to follow and as warning of pitfalls to avoid. Present struggles, however, have to confront new forms of cleavages that fragment the subaltern classes today. What sorts of instruments are now being used to produce coherence and unity?

We have seen how present day fragmentation of the production structure together with the opening to a competitive market from the 1980s onward and the rise of unemployment, casual and precarious jobs, has run parallel with the institutionalization of political and labor conflicts, the hegemony of macroeconomics and a culture of “*concertación*” [agreements]. As a result, previous, institutionalized forms of collective identity such as classical trade unionism have lost public confidence. On the other hand, there are increasing reasons to mobilize: *as workers* in the face of a consistent loss of rights and employment opportunities, *as citizens* in the face of life threatening environmental assaults, *as ordinary people* in the face of the difficulty to make a living. All of these issues could be analyzed and framed in seemingly simple political economic terms producing a structure of common positionalities. However, people experience these commonalities in a particular and fragmented way, from within a structure of feeling embedded in place and personal hardship. Militant particularism is pervasive (Williams 1989 [1981], Harvey 2001). Various forces contribute to form particularized solidarities.

The first one is localism, bounding the space for action to those that suffer a particular aggression. An example of this is the Comité Ciudadano de Emergencia [Citizen's Emergency Committee], a citizen's committee including various neighborhood associations, cultural entities and environmental justice activist networks that was formed to oppose the construction of a Natural Gas Plant inside the bay of Ferrol. The plant was dangerous and didn't comply with EU security regulations, and it was destructive of the marine environment and thus imperiled the livelihood of shellfish gatherers. For more than ten years, this committee has been waging a struggle on the juridical front, through institutional dialogue and confrontation, and in street demonstrations. The movement although formally united is extremely heterogeneous, with interests ranging from issues of fear of accidental injury, to discontent about the loss of value of adjoining property, to the stress over loss of livelihood opportunities attached to destruction of marine environment, to very general claims of political corruption (Narotzky 2007). This in itself marks clear lines of cleavage in the movement. But the main issue is the inability of the movement to "jump scales" (Smith 1993), that is to frame their plight in a larger framework, for example, that of general environmental justice which would link them to other national and international movements (such as Greenpeace). The argument of the leaders of the movement is that they need to combine very different interests, in order to have a large backing locally. Opting for greater abstraction and a wider framing scale would immediately lose them local support. Because the movement of abstraction tends to select a particular aspect of the issue in order to define a general logic of process, it would inevitably marginalize or even antagonize those local participants that explain the problem through a different reasoning.

This argument is fraught with ambivalence, however, as the main leaders of the Citizen's Committee are the heroes of the shipyard struggles of the 1960s that have found new struggles after getting early retirement in the 1990s. While they generally tend to make their analysis in terms of class, in this particular struggle their strategy aims at inclusion, at keeping together a heterogeneous collective that has a unitary aim but a fragmented motivation. They also navigate the tension of their former "accomplishments" and their ultimate "defeat" as the younger participants in the movement speak of the strategy and tactics the old leaders propose both with admiration and with skepticism, but do not challenge it significantly.

A second and related form of particularization is at play in the framing of the terms of conflict. In Ferrol this is expressed by economic nationalism, the idea that the plight of workers is tied to that of firms and employers in the region of Galicia. Economic nationalism is part of an ambivalent past. Strands of economic nationalism appear at different historical moments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Arguably, the autarkic project, followed by the import substitution period of the dictatorship that lasted until 1957 was a nationalist economic project and it produced the growth of such "stable" industries as the nationalized shipyard Bazán. A different strand of economic nationalism is found in the late nineteenth century as Galician intellectuals, often following a traditional catholic corporatist perspective, developed corporatist arguments for a national identity, seeking increased autonomy from the central Spanish government (Afredo Brañas, one of the founders of "*regionalismo*" [regionalism], was inspired by equivalent traditionalist bourgeois movements in Catalonia). During the transition, in the 1970s, a radical left version of economic nationalism was central to the development of the nationalist party (Bloque Nacional Galego, BNG) and the

nationalist union (Confederación Intersindical Galega, CIG). Here economic nationalism was based on a center-periphery analysis of Galician position in world economic systems, also addressing the need to define a Galician centered political economy, oriented from an autonomous project.¹⁵ In the present, this party (BNG) has evolved into a party more accommodating with the interests of capital, while its founding leader, Xosé Manuel Beiras, has gone to found a radical left party, Anova, in 2012.¹⁶ Economic nationalism, therefore has different political declinations. Nevertheless, in everyday practice it gets mostly expressed through the endorsement of local employers' arguments for the need of rationalization. This is presented as "common sense" by the nationalist party BNG and trade union CIG, but also by the leaders in other major unions.

Employees in the small local auxiliary firms often perceive competition with firms from elsewhere in Spain as the main threat to job stability. Juan a young worker in an Auxiliary Company and member of the nationalist union (CIG) explains:

"What people demand is to stay for a while in the same firm, they want stability, not running around changing firms. But the main company keeps changing its contracts from one firm to the other. Now they are making contracts with companies in Madrid and the local companies don't get anything. ... Outside firms move all the time, one day here, the other there. [Then the argument changes] What I don't like is that they are destroying stable companies, with a stable labor pool, with workers who have been stable for 40 years [he is referring to the Nervión conflict], in order to substitute them for companies where 90% of workers are precarious. [And finally concludes] Local employers have their capital here and they invest it locally. With the others, capital goes away." (J. C., 2006).

With a similar argument the left wing of the nationalist party Bloque Nacional Galego insists on the need to defend the Galician employers (*el empresariado gallego*) so that companies don't move to other regions.¹⁷ Xosé Manuel Beiras described it as a re-centering of Galician economy:

“We need to center the dynamics of Galician economy in itself –which does not mean isolating it; we need to strengthen its internal flows, densify its productive fabric, put an end to the extraversion of our growth potential; we need to reinvest within Galicia its economic surplus, and regulate financial circuits in relation to this; we need to take public economic action to those nervous centers where the private entrepreneurial fabric is absent or frail”
(XM Beiras, 2000)¹⁸

The idea is that the future of the worker depends on the future of local firms, so that in the face of global competitive pressures, a corporatist approach is the better solution for all. And as a corollary some of the classic corporatist themes reemerge: workers demands have to recede in the face of supporting competitiveness of Galician companies, class conflict has to be superseded. Here the argument for unity and struggle is couched in the bounding of an imagined community allegedly sharing “the same” interest for the common wellbeing, irrespective of position in the political economic structure. This argument produces a lot of tension and internal contradiction within the rank-and-file of the unions, as workers have to negotiate struggling for better conditions with their Galician employer. Often also, they know that the local employer expands his business outside the region and makes subsidiaries of the company abroad that compete with the local firm.

A third form of militant particularism tries, paradoxically, to transcend particularity and reach a universal level of abstraction to frame conflict. For workers, the awareness of a larger structure encompassing local developments is easier to grasp in the larger firms and generally enables shop stewards to analyze situations and engage struggles in class terms. The case of Pull & Bear's logistics department, part of the Zara-Inditex clothing empire, is a telling example. According to the local Chamber of Commerce president, the Zara group,¹⁹ the major Galician company, wanted to invest locally. Attracted by the good conditions of the industrial park of Narón (in the Ferrol conurbation) they established there the central logistic hub for their Pull & Bear brand. This was a company with no union tradition and it arrived in a region in decline with few employment expectations. But they hired young workers who were, in the words of José, the "sons of the shipyard": "they had a tradition" which they used to organize a section of the main union CCOO and eventually waged a strike for better social and working conditions that ended successfully. The "tradition" they relate to is not only about the tactics of mobilization, but very much about the analysis of concrete issues in terms of a logic of accumulation, framed in political economy understanding. The section that engaged mobilization in Pull & Bear is part of the Trotskyite faction of the union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO-Críticos); they have regular meetings where they study classic texts (Marx, Luxemburg, Trotsky) and analyze present day events and conflicts. They collaborate actively in the journal *El Militante* where they provide analysis of the economic situation and ongoing conflicts in the region. Their aim is revolutionary and their work is to get workers to think beyond particularism, get them to "jump scales" and define the real adversary. José, however, admits that it was difficult to unionize workers. This younger generation of trade unionists see themselves as distant from the institution of the union which in the past provided the instruments for

widening the scale of conflict. To them the union resembles a small business and is completely alienated from the workers. José explains:

“The institutional leadership of the union is incapable of struggle; they only know how to negotiate, make deals. The feeling is that the bureaucracy of the union is stopping us but the way to get things is through struggle. People are tired of putting up with the situation. This is a new generation of young people that does not bear the failure of the transition and does not agree on how the union manages things. There is no real authority in the union. But people are learning.” (J. P., 2006).

For José, the need for struggle is present because labor conditions are deteriorating but the union leadership has alienated itself from struggle by making deals, although it is still a useful structure to infiltrate. For this young activist, the previous generation of shipyard workers is both an example to follow and one to avoid. It is a “tradition” that enlightens as to the capacity of collective struggle and possible strategies: it situates them in a lineage as “the sons of the shipyard”. But it is also the expression of the ultimate failure of the class unions, co-opted by the institutions that produced the practice of “agreements” and enclosed the spaces for struggle.

Collective identities, memories and struggles

What then can we conclude from these experiences in Ferrol? As in many other areas of de-industrializing Europe, struggles in twenty-first century Ferrol are very different from what they were in the past century. They have become increasingly particularized and fragmented in different ways. They trace links to past conflicts drawing particular lessons from both positive and negative interpretations that in turn help configure the grounds for present day collective identity formation.

The three axes I have presented –defeat, suffering and struggle—produce a dense fabric of connections and disconnections among and between ordinary subaltern people in Ferrol. Through the dimensions of time and space we can follow the production of conjunctions and disjunctions, of continuities, momentary blockages and dead-ends. We can also perceive how different levels of intimacy and distancing, of concreteness and abstraction produce tensions that real people have to negotiate everyday. It might be easy for the anthropologist observing this reality from a certain distance – which inevitably favors objectification - to define what is going on in terms of, for example, the internalization of abstract processes and logics. But this is not a possibility for those fully engaged in living their life, making sense of it and fighting for a better future. As Raymond Williams (1989 [1977]) and Eric Hobsbawm (1984 [1971]) both pointed out, abstraction and organization are necessary to “jump scales” (in Neil Smith’s terms) in the framing of a particular conflict in order to render it more universal and possibly more transformative of the structures. Simultaneously, however, this is a process of reification, where “relations between men are made into relations between things or relations between concepts” (Williams 1989 [1977]: 117; cf. also Harvey’s analysis 2001). So if we want to respond to our initial question “What kinds of collectives need to be produced in order to achieve a radical transformation of capitalist relations of production and a substantively democratic political space?” we need to address the central tension between the forces that produce militant particularism and those that are used to produce abstraction and expand the scale of organization and struggle. This is a tension that cannot easily be resolved in either sense for two distinct albeit related reasons.

The first is of an empirical nature, in that experience is always unique, and although interpersonal sharing, verbalization and action produce commonality (Thompson 1966)

there is a limit to the extension of this collective identification, of what Raymond Williams (1989 [1977]) called the “simple affirmation, affirmation with extension” of community. Further extension always requires a degree of abstraction that implies a loss of perceived realism, a “negation” of experience, while simultaneously extending the leverage of our experience and understanding. Some material realities, however, are shared in a more homogeneous way and conducive to easier generalization although, often, one only superficially based on an abstract understanding of the logics structuring these shared experiences. This was the case of the Civil War confrontation when the conflict was simplified as opposing two factions those fighting for democracy and those against it, which was translated in the opposing camp as those fighting to save the Christian fatherland (the rebel armies of Franco) and those destroying it (the socialist and laic republicans). Later, during the Franco regime’s violent repression of the working class and of democrats, the adjective “red” often glossed over very different experiences and objectives but resulted in creating a strong sense of commonality among those opposing the regime. In both of these cases, dispossession was felt in a very direct and material way by the Left all over Spain, producing solidarity and identity.

It was also the case, in a different way, of the post-war industrial and economic policies that favored the development of Fordism in key sectors of industry which created commonality in work experience and the reconstruction of a class trade unionism. Class unionism in the context of a dictatorship was able to understand and organize labor struggle as key to the political struggle to transform society. The period of industrial restructuring and neo-liberal expansion from the 1980s onwards, on the opposite, produced a material experience of dispossession –of employment, skills, security—that was paradoxically presented by those “representing” workers (Socialist party, trade

union leaders) as a positive program –European economic integration, increased competitiveness, growth that would bring employment, etc.—in a language of “agreements” and rational and responsible politics, where legitimate confrontation was always represented as limited to localized issues, not systemic ones. Here, a sense of alienation from those same institutions that had been apparently conquered in the struggle of the transition produced an effect of retrenchment into immediate experience, as opposed to a formalized organization that was becoming estranged and difficult to understand.

The second reason why the tensions between militant particularism and the abstraction necessary to expand the scale of organization and struggle is not easily resolved is of a theoretical nature that can be elaborated via the insights of Henri Lefebvre (1972).

While particularism and fragmentation are the facts of life, so are commonality and unity, depending on the level of abstraction and on the time and scale frames we use to make sense of reality. In both the immediate and distanced analysis of real life we confront the following issue: What appears as fragmented is part of a unit but its imaginary fragmentation has real effects on the way the unit can be reproduced. In other words, we can understand the unitary system of capitalist accumulation as producing different forms of fragmentation at different historical moments and in different localities, which are then part and parcel of that by which the unitary system creates its conditions of possibility for social reproduction (Wolf 1982). This is, in my opinion, the deep sense of the concept of militant particularism that Raymond Williams proposes as a form of struggle which tries to capture the reality of different scales operating simultaneously. It addresses the challenge to both acknowledge the “logic” of connections within the system, both time and space connections, without losing their particular expression and the experience that drives people to think in terms of a

community of interest. In Williams' words: "the concept of a practical and possible general interest, which really does include all reasonable particular interests, has to be negotiated, found, agreed, constructed." (1989 [1981]:255). It captures the immanent contradiction that Hobsbawm (1984 [1971]) struggled with when trying to define class consciousness at the two levels of "trade union" and of "socialist" consciousness, the latter linked to the development of "organization", and formal institutions of leadership. The "lower level" consciousness of the more spontaneous trade union struggles, had to be complemented by a "higher level" consciousness produced by "organization" in a purposeful manner (1984 [1971]:27-28). The necessary mediation of organization, however, produces a "divergence, between 'class' and 'organization'" (1984 [1971]:28), between class as experienced by people and the organization that gives it collective form and transforms it into a *subject* of history capable of enacting policy (Hobsbawm 1984 [1977]). This process of substitution and distancing through the structure of organization is both necessary to give "the people" a "reality" and often an obstacle to immediate mobilization (1984 [1977]:293).

In the case I have presented, this seems to be so because the neo-corporatist transition "agreements" became so closely bound with neoliberal policy that they produced a wronging of the expectations of workers by those institutions representing the working-class. The use of macroeconomic rationality and of pragmatic political "responsibility" on the part of the unions and socialist party appeared as the ultimate "negation" of hard won organization and community in past struggles, and a blatant betrayal of immediate struggles. So that, in the end, scale was in fact negated, the tension between the particular and the universal was erased, and the possibility for the unions of addressing the wrongs inflicted to the rank-and-file workers disappeared. In this conjuncture,

memory has become an instrument that reintroduces time and space scales in the attempt to organize struggle.

In Ferrol people make various links between the past and the present. They see the present as an outcome of the past, as when the agreements reached by the unions during the restructuring conflict are explained as the prelude to present day precarity. They see the present as the road to an imagined project in the future, when they define their struggles as aiming at a nationalist project of community, or at the possibility of a better life in a safer environment. These connections and disconnections are a crucial element in the local expression of systemic social reproduction. They produce both solidarity and cleavages that construct new collective identities and help redefine the conflicts that should be addressed. They generate a particular field of forces that creates the conditions of possibility for engaging in transformative struggles and, in so doing, sets the field of social reproduction.

I think that as anthropologists we are in a particularly favorable position to explore the connection between the empirical nature of experience and the theoretical constructs developed both locally and by the distanced observer. The ways in which particular conflicts in Ferrol are being defined and struggles waged in the present, are deeply embedded in the way larger forces such as Francoist economic development, participation in the western bloc, neoliberal imperatives of European accession, liberalization of markets, etc. became fixed in a place and inscribed in the bodies of successive generations of men and women. And that is why the ways they still find to achieve commonalities appeal to place and body, and to the ties that bind them through time. The threads that situate them and commit them speak of the shipyard, the region, the lineages, and the suffering body. The realization that these elements of commonality that produce militant particularism are widely shared is central to their ability to expand

and articulate collective identities. This might explain why suffering, as the immediate homology that should unite all those that share the hardship of earning a living, becomes in the last instance the metonym they appeal to as their basic commonality. However, as they go along the way trying to build coalitions that will help them achieve a better life, they need to find bridges that help negotiate the cleavages set by the various experiences of space and time. Some are negotiated through lineages that bring together generations separated by disappointment; others are negotiated through a notion of region/ nation that draws together different positions in the local economy and society; still others are negotiated through class pulling together those that live from a wage. All are only partial roads to inclusion through particular scale-frames that produce unity and fragmentation simultaneously, and often impair struggle. Further along the way the challenge is to define a collective identity that might achieve a significant capacity to transform the overwhelming reality of defeat, loss and disbelief. Here, a level of abstraction that transcends particularism while expressing it has to be found, clearly defined and transmitted.

In Europe and elsewhere the larger forces of expanding capitalism have historically become inscribed in different ways. The value of difference for capitalist expansion is *specific and place bound*, therefore the common factor is that historically produced *specificities* are always exploited to the outmost by being reproduced as such. At the same time, the hegemony of macroeconomic thought infuses everyday experience with a transcendent reality. The focus on personal and social reproduction on the one hand, and the awareness of the simultaneous operation of different scales on the other, are in my view the best methodological inroads to understanding this process. On the ground however, this realization is expressed as a tension between structures without soul that

enable expanding the stakes of the struggle, and real people with the capacity to form solidary groups and wage immediate struggles.

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² Ferrol, a town of 74,799 inhabitants in 1960 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) ranked second after Madrid in the number of Ministers it provided during the Franco regime (8 out of 119) (Riquer 2010:27).

³ Malo (2005) proposes that individual dismissal of workers was costly but easy and became an important instrument of workforce regulation in times of crises after 1956.

⁴ Country Report on Spain, authors: Irene Sabaté & Claire Montgomery. Project “Models and their Effects on Development paths: an Ethnographic and comparative Approach to knowledge transmission and livelihood strategies” (MEDEA), FP7- CT-2009-225670.

<http://www.medeasteelproject.org/home.html> (access February 20th 2011)

⁵ It is interesting to note that this also meant the ascent of economists in substitution of engineers in the ruling of the national economy (expressed in the confrontation between Suanzes –who resigned from the Instituto Nacional de Industria in 1963-- and López Rodó –who became the head of the Office of the development plan in 1962). It also meant the ascent to power of the Opus Dei, where most of these technocrats militated. Last, it should be remembered that Laureano López Rodó, the main artifex of the modernizing development policies and the ‘technical’ administration of the economy was very closely linked to Admiral Carrero Blanco, the right hand of Franco, like him born in Ferrol.

⁶ Spain asked to be admitted into the EEC in 1962, and was refused on political grounds, namely lack of freedom and a democratic system.

⁷ The Opus Dei was founded in 1928 by the Spanish priest Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. It was aimed at achieving sanctification through the exercise of any professional occupation by embedding Christian duties in the ordinary wake of life. After supporting the National Catholic side during the Civil War, through its strength in education institutions, the congregation acquired an increasing influence in the regime, providing many members of successive governments. In 2002 the Opus Dei founder was canonized by Pope John Paul II.

⁸ The number of strikes jumped from 855 in 1975 to 1568 in 1976 and 1789 in 1979 (Navarrete & Puyal 1995:148)

⁹ In general terms the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO, communist union) was less prone to sign the agreements, while Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT, socialist union) signed them all, arguing that “in a crisis situation a great sense of responsibility was necessary” (Domínguez, 1990:82). During the first ten years after Franco, CCOO signed only two (the Acuerdo Nacional de Empleo, signed in 1981 a few months after the attempted coup of the 23 of February by Colonel Tejero, and the Acuerdo Interconfederal of 1983) and gave tacit support to the Pactos de la Moncloa, 1977. The UGT for its part signed the Acuerdo Básico Interconfederal (1979), Acuerdo Marco Interconfederal (1980), Acuerdo Nacional de Empleo (1981), Acuerdo Interconfederal (1983), Acuerdo Económico y Social (1984).

¹⁰ However, an actor such as the socialist union leader Justo Domínguez perceived it as a new form of “trade unionism which is inserted in the State’s institutions, a trade unionism of participation, that is or tries to be where decisions are made” (Domínguez 1990:98)

¹¹ All names of informants have been changed.

¹² We have argued elsewhere, that the economic environment of scarcity, illegality and arbitrariness was a central part of the creation of fear during the Autarky years of the Franco dictatorship (Narotzky & Smith 2006, Richards 1998)

¹³ This seems difficult if we think that Ferrol has the lower average income / person in all of Galicia (1,120 euro) and that more than 25% of salaried persons are paid under the minimum average salary of 640 euro /month. 60% of households in Galicia get at least one income coming from retirement or other state subsidies (mostly unemployment), making in average 30% of total household income. 23% of households live with less than 1,000 euro / month and 32% live under the 1,500 euro / threshold. In 30% of households income from subsidies provides more than 75% of the total. For a nuclear family with two children the threshold of poverty was set at 1,280 euros in 2008, with 14% of households beneath it in Galicia. 75% of young people (under 30) live with their parents, although 50% of them have some work (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2010)

¹⁴ *El Militante. Voz del Socialismo Marxista y de la Juventud*, 17 de julio 2006.

¹⁵ “Galiza, como economía periférica – só que europea, convén que reitere - non ficou á marxe dese turbulento acontecer globalizador. De xeito que se agravou unha súa patoloxía “conxénita”, digámolo así, a saber : a carencia dun modelo de acumulación endóxena, que puidese cando menos contrarrestar a súa dinámica extravertida, como economía “ sen fronteiras”, a drenaxe do seu excedente económico monetarizado, o seu problema de crecemento “cara fóra”, constantemente reprodutor do seu histórico subdesenvolvemento – parafraseando agora ao recentemente finado André Gunder-Frank” (Xosé Manuel Beiras, 2006, <http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/31657> , access November 2 2010)

¹⁶ The new party ran in a coalition with two other parties in the left for the 2012 regional elections. The coalition, Alternativa Galega de Esquerda (AGE) was voted third after the Partido Popular (neoliberal right) and the Partido Socialista Galego (social democrat).

¹⁷ Some members of this left wing are now migrating to the new party Anova.

¹⁸ “Compre centrar a dinámica da economía galega nela propia –cousa ben distinta de isola-la–; potenciar os seus fluxos internos, densificar o seu entramado produtivo, acabar coa extraversión do noso potencial de crecemento, reinvertirmos dentro dela o seu excedente económico, regular en función diso os circuitos financeiros, levar a acción económica pública a aqueles centros nervosos nos que o tecido empresarial privado estexa ausente ou enfraquecido.” (XM Beiras, 2000)

¹⁹ Amancio Ortega, the founder and owner of a large stock of shares of the company is the 7th richest man in the world just following closely Lakshmi Mittal and well ahead of George Soros (46th), according to Forbes (2011), http://www.forbes.com/wealth/billionaires#p_1_s_arank_-1_-1, access 20 August 2011.